

Media Relations and Crises Communication After an Accident

After a serious accident, it is likely that you will be contacted by the media. There is also a possibility that they will respond to an accident scene while emergency personnel are working.

The job of the media personnel is to gather newsworthy matters for their newspaper, radio or TV stations. A bad accident involving a highly visible public transit vehicle is a very newsworthy story for most local news media organizations. With proper preparation a moderately skilled agency representative can use the occasion to improve agency image or at the very least control damage.

The following guidelines should be followed:

Media Relations – At the Scene

1. All Agency personnel should be instructed that all questions are to be referred to the Agency representative, normally a member of senior staff.
2. The designated representative should be available to the media as soon as possible. They have deadlines and will not wait for you to tell your side of the story, no matter how good.
3. Do not panic – be under control.
4. Never say “No Comment”. It makes you look like you have something to hide. It is better to say that “the cause of the accident is unknown at this time and is under investigation”.
5. Control the interview as much as possible. Insert information about positive safety activities and other good things that your Agency does.
6. Be prepared for tough questions or questions that cannot be answered without incrimination.
7. Be aware of liability issues. Do not admit anything that could come back to haunt you or be used as evidence in court.

Media Relations - After the Accident

1. Control entry to your premises.
2. Meet with media promptly.
3. Instruct employees not to talk to media.
4. If a press conference is necessary:
 - a) Choose the venue carefully.
 - b) Prepare a written statement in advance.
 - c) Consider consulting a media expert if the accident and resulting situation is bad.
 - d) Have a media kit that includes an Agency fact sheet, positive articles and good things that your Agency does for the community.
 - e) Do not reveal confidential information “off the record.” Do not legitimize negative, incorrect or hearsay information.

- f) Always be friendly, brief, positive, composed and stick to your side of the story. Do not argue with reporters. Remember that your image may be seen by thousands on the 6:00 news tonight.